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ROLE OF MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT IN RURAL ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:-Rural development is a human process. It requires hard work, dedication, responsiveness and accountability of all the participants under this process. The Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India, is the apex body spearheading the movement against the poverty. And the same ministry implements a number of programmes for poverty alleviation & rural development in India. The NREGA is the one among such programmes, which notified on 7th September, 2005. It aims at enhancing livelihood security of household in rural areas of the country. NREGA, on 2nd October, 2009, renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). It works under right based framework and time bound guarantee of employment. It is a tool for women empowerment and decentralized planning system. Public accountability and transparency is main feature of the Act. It works as an instrument of rural infrastructural development, enhancement of rural natural resources and helpful in Human capital development. Thus, it is a paradigm shift from previous wages employment programmes implemented in Indian history. Through this paper I am trying to put some light on the role of MGNREGA in rural economic development.

Keywords:Accountability, Employment, Gram Panchayat, Livelihood, MGNREGA, Rural.

INTRODUCTION:

Rural development is not a mechanical development. It is a human process. It requires hard work, dedication, responsiveness and accountability of both officials and non-officials to make rural development a success. Rural Development in India is a mammoth task. India is a country of more than one billion people-the second most populous country on earth (after china). In spite of a strong trend of urbanization, the vast majority of the population is rural. Additionally, about a third of the total population still lives below the poverty line. The level of poverty prevalent causes not only physical misery, but also weakness to the sufferers emotionally and psychologically and even dehumanizes them. The Ministry of Rural Development, Government India, is the apex body spearheading the movement against poverty in the country. The Ministry implements a number of programmes targeted at the critical dimensions of poverty so that a holistic socio-economic network is developed to envelope and protect the poorest of the poor in the country, and empower them to become masters of their own destiny.

India is a vast country and development of its rural areas is a major challenge. However, there is growing realization, that economic development and commendable advances made by the nation in diverse fields would in reality be meaningless, if they fail to translate into better and dignified life for the majority living in rural India. Thus the focus now has been shifted towards development in rural areas so that the country is able to realize its potentials and secure a rightful place of pride in the comity of nation¹.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) notified on 7th September, 2005, aims at enhancing livelihood Security of households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The choice of works suggested in the Act addresses causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation and soil erosion, so that process of employment generation is maintained on a sustainable basis. The Act covered 200 districts in its first phase, implemented on February 2, 2006, and was extended to 330 additional districts in 2007-08. All the remaining rural areas have been notified with effect from April 1, 2008.

NREGA, On October 2, 2009 renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is one of the largest rights based social protection initiatives in the world.

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE ACT:

1. Right based Framework:

- Adult members of the rural household are willing to do unskilled manual work may apply for registration to the local Gram Panchayat in writing or orally.
- The Gram Panchayat after due verification will issue a job card. The job card will bear the photograph of all adult members of the household and is free of cost.
- A job card holding household may submit a written application for employment to the Gram Panchayat, stating the time and duration for which work is sought.

2. Time bound Guarantee:

- The Gram Panchayat will issue a dated receipt of the written application for employment against which the guarantee of providing employment within 15 days operates. If employment is not provided within 15 days, daily unemployment allowance, in cash has to be paid. Liability of payment of unemployment allowance is of the states.
- Work should ordinarily be provided within 5 kilometer radius of the village else extra wages of 10% are payable.
- Wages are to be paid according to minimum wages. Disbursement of wages has to be done on weekly basis and not beyond a fortnight.

3. Women Empowerment:

- At least one third of persons to whom work is allotted, have to be women.

4. Decentralised Planning:

- The shelf of projects has to be prepared by Gram Sabha. At least 50% of works have to be allotted to Gram Panchayats for execution.
- Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) have a principal role in planning and implementation.

5. Labour Intensive Works:

- A 60:40 wage and material ratio has to be maintained. Contractors and use of labour displacing machinery is prohibited.

6. Public Accountability:

- Social Audit has to be done by the Gram Sabha.
- Grievance redressal mechanisms have to be put in place for ensuring a responsive implementation process.

7. Transparency:

- All accounts and records relating to the scheme are to be made available to any person desirous of obtaining a copy of such records on demand and after paying a specified fee².

IMPACT OF MGNREGA ON RURALECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Economic development refers to increase in the standard of living of a nation's population associated with sustained growth from a simple, low income economy to a modern, high income economy. Its scope includes the process and policies by which a nation improves the economic, political and social well-being of its people³. The MGNREGA since its beginning is playing an important role in rural economy and development, besides generating employment it is also strengthening the natural resources. MGNREGA is bringing a salient revaluation in rural areas and its economy.

(i) Employment Generation

MGNREGA is reducing severe poverty spreading in villages through employment generation and contributing a lot in rural economy. The pioneer programme saw its budget outlay increase to Rs. 30,100 crore in the budget for 2009-10. In the last fiscal, the same stood at Rs.16,000 crore MGNREGA provided employment to over 4.47 crore households in previous fiscal year. During the first year of implementation (2006-07) in 200 districts more than 2.10 crore households were employed and 90.5 crore person days were generated and in 2007-08, 3.39 crore households were provided employment and 143.59 crore person days were generated in 330 districts. During 2008-09, 4.5 crore households have been provided employment and 215.63 crore person days have been generated across the country. Presently this scheme is giving jobs to around 3 per cent (4.10 crore) of India's population.⁴ The above scenario presents that MGNREGA is working as an instrument of employment generation and contributing a lot in rural economy.

(ii) Enhancement of Rural Natural Resources

Indian villages are full of natural resources but due to the ignorance they are laying waste and now under MGNREGA such natural resource are being protected and renewed. The scheme is focused on strengthening natural resource management such as afforestation, drought proofing, flood proofing, water conservation, soil erosion etc. The Act has become a significant vehicle for regeneration of India's depleting natural resources base and it seems that in long term this net of natural resource might have a huge impact on our country environment and gross agricultural output.⁵ Even the state like Rajasthan is now

being afforested under MGNREGA.

(iii) Infrastructural Development

The scheme is contributing a lot in infrastructural development and capital formation in rural areas. It is creating durable assets like rural roads, water bodies, minor irrigation tanks, market sheds for unemployed people, water harvesting structure, community wells, flood control plantation and so on Road construction is important for village development because in rural areas roads washed away with every monsoon and they become disconnected with other area.

A particular significance of MGNREGA is that many of the assets created under the programme can directly benefit the poor. The Act specifies the individual work but for the welfare of the whole village or community.⁶

(iv) Strengthening Democracy and Decentralization

MGNREGA is such a scheme which ensures the involvement of local people in every decision. The rural people working under scheme can select work and work-site, bargain for minimum wages, give suggestions for better work and make complaints, involve in implementation of projects and their social auditing. It strengthens the democratic decentralization process at the grass root level by incorporating gram-panchayats and gram sabha in the entire planning and decision-making process.⁷ If the local people will participate in decision-making, the actual meaning of democracy will reflect.

(v) Rural-Urban Migration

The MGNREGA, by guaranteeing employment, will alleviate the problem of rural-urban migration. The MGNREGA will have significant positive impact on seasonal rural-urban migrations by providing rural workers with employment during the lean season.

(vi) Development of Human Capital

The public works that will be undertaken under the ambit of the MGNREGA have the potential to develop human capital by promoting skills in rural India. This may be through 'learning-by-doing' kind of processes or through formal training of the workers by experienced/trained personnel.⁸

(vii) Health Improvement

In India more than 70 per cent people live in villages and such a big fraction of population have found ill health due to lack of health facilities. Through MGNREGA government is also trying to improve the health status of people providing clean drinking water, proper drainage system, construction of toilets, ensures health facilities at work-sites opening the child care centers and supply nutritious food for them. Poverty is a big enemy of health because the people having the inadequate financial resources cannot invest a lot for health improvement. Healthy people are a valuable asset of the society and MGNREGA is enhancing the financial resources the rural people. Under this scheme, sometimes the campaign is taken to the villages and also this scheme is helping the 'National Health Mission' by building hospitals to updated health facilities. It is also increasing the educational status of people and working as an instrument of women empowerment.

(viii) E-governance

MGNREGA has taken e-revolution in rural areas. It has provided an opportunity of e-governance at the village level in panchayats to connect them with computers and having internet facilities.⁹ MGNREGA is a very vast programme and for its effective implementation and proper functioning e-governance is required. It also ensures the transparency and accountability and lessens the corruption. Many states like; Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, UP, Orissa, Kerala are using smart cards and hand held devices to capture details of workers, work and wages (WWW) including the muster-rolls, job cards, registration of work, demand for work and so on. Such smart cards are biometric which has finger prints authentication and are easy to use for illiterate people.¹⁰

SUGGESTIONS:

- The MGNREGA should be linked with other developmental programmes like Drought Prone Area Programme, National Horticulture Mission etc.
- To ensure greater dissemination of information and participation of rural people at every stage of MGNREGA, from planning and execution, the role of civil society should be emphasized.

CONCLUSION:

The MGNREGA marks a paradigm shift from previous wage employment programmes either planned or implemented in India's history. MGNREGA is unlike any other in its scale, architecture and thrust. It has an integrated natural resource management and livelihoods generation perspective. The transparency and accountability mechanisms under MGNREGA create unprecedented accountability of performance, especially towards immediate stakeholders. MGNREGA has become a powerful instrument for inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic governance.

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